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ABSTRACT

This paper is directed to policy and practice leaders interested in making urban secondary and postsecondary learning environments more widely available, especially to young people who have not been well-served by the large, impersonal high schools dominating most cities. Section 1, "Coming of Age in a Time of Economic and Demographic Change," reviews the demographic and economic trends that create an imperative to develop effective alternatives to the one-size-fits-all high school. Section 2, "New Ferment, New Opportunities," discusses the policy ferment and growing momentum for high school reform in urban centers that make the development of more varied and effective learning options possible. Section 3, "A Portfolio of Learning Environments for Urban Youth," highlights a range of learning environments that produce strong results for urban youths. These innovations cluster into four institutional forms that reach across the usual boundaries between secondary and postsecondary education, education and youth development, and employment and learning, providing building blocks for a redesigned system. Section 4, "Investing in New Learning Environments and Educational Pathways," presents a set of specific recommendations for policy and practice leaders committed to developing programs that work. (Contains 21 references.) (SM)

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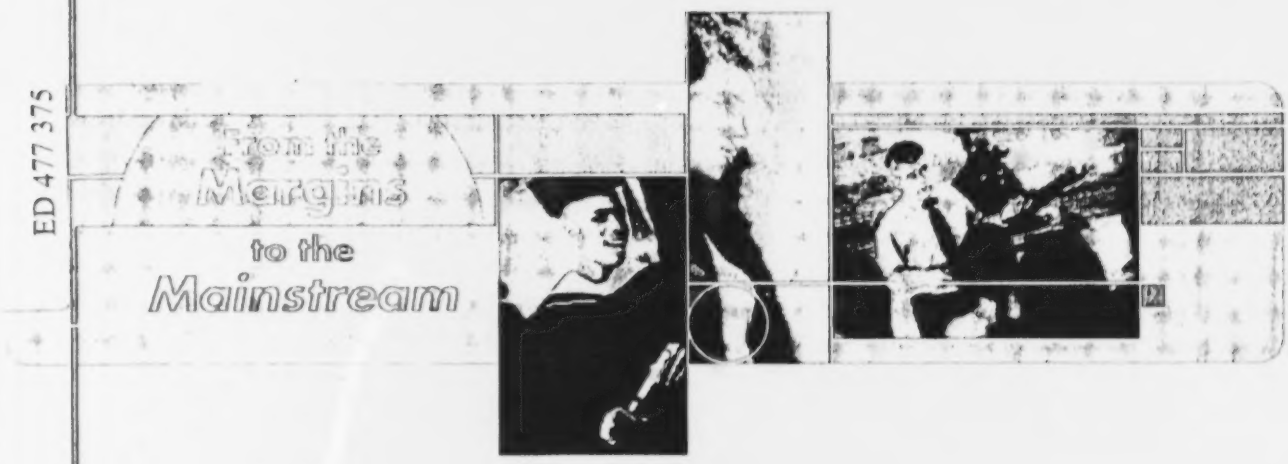

Four Building Blocks for a System of Educational Opportunity: Developing Pathways To and Through College for Urban Youth

By Adria Steinberg, Cheryl Almeida, Lili Allen, and Sue Goldberger, Jobs for the Future

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CREATING STRATEGIES
for Educational and Economic Opportunity

UD 035 706

From the Margins to the Mainstream

From the Margins to the Mainstream seeks practical answers to the question of how communities can take advantage of breakthrough possibilities offered by emerging, powerful learning environments—inside and outside of the school building, school day, and school year. It seeks to develop policies and practices that increase the impact and visibility of learning environments that succeed in getting young people onto a pathway to high school diplomas and college-level studies and that engage them in contributing to their communities. The initiative is supported by grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and Atlantic Philanthropies.

Profiles, practices, and products identified and developed by *From the Margins to the Mainstream* are available at www.jff.org/Margins/Index.html.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

CREATING STRATEGIES

Jobs for the Future seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers.

About the Authors

Lili Allen is a Program Director at Jobs for the Future, where she manages several projects related to youth education and transitions. She is author or co-author of several publications related to youth, including *From Large to Small: Strategies for Personalizing the High School; Wall to Wall: Implementing Small Learning Communities in Five Boston High Schools; Knowing and Doing: Connecting Learning and Work; Competencies That Count: Strategies for Assessing High Performance Skills;* and *Involving English Language Learners in Community-Connected Learning.*

Cheryl Almeida directs research for *From the Margins to the Mainstream.* As a member of Jobs for the Future's Expert Faculty, she provided technical assistance and professional development to the Connected Learning Communities Network and helped develop a tool kit that offers practical ways for communities to develop, sustain, and assess community-connected learning.

Susan Goldberger, Ph.D., is responsible for growing and managing a new body of work for Jobs for the Future: creating social business ventures to expand educational and economic opportunity for low-income youth and adults. For four years, Dr. Goldberger directed JFF's youth development and education reform efforts. Her senior management responsibilities included directing a multi-city urban high school reform initiative and several school-to-career enterprises featuring innovative work and learning models.

Adria Steinberg is a Program Director at Jobs for the Future, where she leads *From the Margins to the Mainstream* and is a core partner to the Boston Public Schools in its Schools for a New Society high school reform efforts. She has authored many publications, including a five-year stint as primary writer/editor of *The Harvard Education Letter.* Recent publications include: *Real Learning, Real Work* (Routledge Press, 1997), *Schooling for the Real World* (with Kathleen Cushman and Rob Riordan) (Jossey-Bass, 1999) and *City-Works* (with David Stephen) (The New Press, 1999).

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Four Building Blocks for a System of Educational Opportunity:

Developing Pathways To and Through College for Urban Youth

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Four Building Blocks for a System of Educational Opportunity:

Developing Pathways To and Through College for Urban Youth

Executive Summary

The far-reaching economic and demographic changes of the past two decades have created both an urgent need and a powerful opening to develop new pathways to educational and economic opportunity for 16- to 24-year-old urban youth. At the very moment when higher levels of skills and credentials are required to ensure a family-supporting income, the fastest growing segments of our population consist of the young people who have been least well-served by our secondary and postsecondary education and workforce development systems.

As a nation, we fare poorly in moving young people into and through college. While 74 percent of young people get a high school diploma, and nearly three-quarters of these graduates eventually enroll in a postsecondary institution, a postsecondary credential remains out of reach for all but a handful. Over half fail to complete a degree and one-third never even see their sophomore year. Among African-American and Hispanic youth, only 18 percent and 10 percent respectively complete a four-year college degree by age 29, and young people whose family income is under $25,000 have less than a 6 percent chance of earning a four-year degree. These are the same young people who will come to dominate the college-age population in the next 15 years: 80 percent of the growth in the college-age population is projected to be non-white.

Increasingly, practitioners and policymakers alike are recognizing that the promise to "leave no child behind" can only be realized by moving beyond the limitations of our current policies and institutions. This is leading to a growing demand at the state and community levels for new kinds of learning environments that are more effective and efficient in getting young people onto pathways to economic self-sufficiency and active citizenship. This paper speaks to that need, first by identifying and describing four learning environments that are successful in engaging urban youth in learning and putting them onto pathways through college, and second, by proposing strategies for improving and expanding such options.

Four types of institutions and institutional arrangements constitute the building blocks for a system of educational opportunity that includes vulnerable youth:

- *Reinvented High Schools*: Small, highly focused and rigorous learning environments that use curriculum, staff, community resources, and time in radically different ways to enhance the intellectual growth and address the diverse needs and circumstances of high school age youth, engaging them in work that matters to them and a larger community.
- *Secondary/Postsecondary Blends*: New institutional arrangements aimed at making the transition to college happen *better* (fewer youth fall through the cracks) and *faster* so that young people complete a first postsecondary credential by their mid 20s.
- *Extended Learning Opportunities*: Programs that make creative use of time and resources outside the usual school building and school day to engage young

While 74 percent of young people get a high school diploma, and nearly three-quarters of these graduates eventually enroll in a postsecondary institution, over half fail to complete a degree and one-third never even see their sophomore year.

people in intensive learning that is potentially credit-bearing (toward high school graduation).

- *Education/Employment Blends*: Programs and institutional arrangements that combine academic and vocational studies, technical training leading to a credential with value in the labor market, and work experience, hence stepping across the usual divide between education and workforce development.

The proliferation of these four learning environments represents a critical component of any strategy that leaders in state and local policy and practice would adopt to address the growing mismatch between the educational experiences and credentials required by our economy and the low educational attainment of so many of our youth. These types of institutions can and should become the building blocks of an education system that guarantees youth the educational choices, opportunities, and supports they need to complete a postsecondary credential by their mid 20s.

It is both particularly challenging and particularly important to support innovative designs and approaches in a time of deep budget deficits, such as many states and cities are facing today. If anything, the current fiscal crisis makes redirecting investment to new learning environments even more essential. Large, under-performing high schools, with their high drop-out and failure rates, are not cost effective. Nor is it cost effective for colleges to spend a billion dollars a year on remedial courses for high school graduates unprepared for college work. And the costs to society further escalate once a young person drops out of high school or college without the skills or credentials to advance to a family-supporting career. The types of learning environments featured in this report hold out the promise to citizens of paying once, rather than two or three times, for the education of urban youth.

We offer six action steps *(see box)* that state and local policymakers can take to address the current crisis. These action steps are intended to elevate current efforts to develop more effective learning environments beyond the level of experiments around the edges and to tackle the challenge of adequate funding and scale.

By building on ongoing public support for education and growing momentum for high school reform, policymakers can do a great deal to remove barriers to new school designs and youth programming models. And they can provide incentives, including adequate funding, for new institutional forms and arrangements to bridge the gaps among high school, "second-chance" programs, and college. Ultimately, if high-quality learning environments are to be available to *all* young people, states and communities will need to leverage the expansion of these learning environments for deeper change in the educational delivery system itself.

Six Action Steps for Improving Educational Outcomes of Urban Youth

1. Direct state and local resources to follow young people into reinvented high schools and new institutional blends, such as Early College High School and education/employment programs resulting in postsecondary credentials.
2. Make the development of new small schools a key component of systemic, citywide, high school reform efforts.
3. Change school construction policies and related regulations that favor large over small high schools.
4. Make the development of alternative learning environments for youth who have left the public school system a central component of a citywide human investment strategy.
5. Leverage opportunities to extend learning beyond the school day and year and beyond the school building.
6. Strengthen the capacity of effective school and program models to achieve scale.

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Four Building Blocks for a System of Educational Opportunity:

Developing Pathways To and Through College for Urban Youth

Introduction

Marketers target urban youth from their mid-teens to their mid 20s. It's time for policymakers to do the same. Millions of dollars go into promoting styles of appearance, music, and behavior invented by urban young people, and millions more into convincing them to buy particular products. Meanwhile, the societal investment in this age group is neither sufficient nor sufficiently directed toward helping them get the educational experiences and credentials they need for a satisfying and productive adulthood.

In their lifetime, today's 16- to 24-year-olds have seen major economic shifts that put a premium on education. Young people have absorbed the message that in today's economy they will need more than a high school diploma to gain entry into careers that offer a family-supporting income. Yet, increasingly, the aspirations of young people and their families appear to be on a collision course with what our fragmented youth-serving policies, institutions, and programs seem prepared to deliver.

Far too many young people emerge from the "coming of age" period between their mid-teens and mid-twenties lacking the educational experiences and credentials to advance to a family-supporting career. Ill-prepared by the educational system for the demands of adulthood in an increasingly complex economy, they continue to move in and out of low-wage, dead-end jobs, and in and out of the seemingly revolving door of postsecondary education, often with no knowledge of how to get from where they are to the lives they had once dreamed of having.

If young people are to reach adulthood prepared to participate fully in our society and economy, they must have access to high-quality learning environments that enable and accelerate a smooth transition to college and careers. This paper is directed to policy and practice leaders interested in making such learning environments more widely available, especially to young people who have not been well-served by the large, impersonal high schools that dominate the educational landscape in our cities.

Section I reviews the demographic and economic trends that create an imperative to develop effective alternatives to the "one-size-fits-all" high school.

Section II looks at the policy ferment and growing momentum for high school reform in urban centers that make the development of more varied and effective learning options possible.

Section III highlights a range of learning environments producing strong results for urban youth. These innovations cluster into four institutional forms that reach across the usual boundaries between secondary and postsecondary education, education and youth development, and employment and learning, and in doing so, provide building blocks for a redesigned system.

Section IV presents a set of specific recommendations for policy and practice leaders committed to growing more of what works.

The Good News

For every **ten** students who start high school

Eight will get a diploma

The Challenge

But only **six** will enroll in a postsecondary institution

Fewer than **three** will complete a Bachelor's degree within ten years

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I. Coming of Age in a Time of Economic and Demographic Change

The far-reaching economic and demographic changes of the past two decades have created a volatile situation. At the very moment when higher levels of skills and credentials are required to ensure a family-supporting income, the fastest growing segments of our population consist of the young people who have been least well-served by the institutions, programs, and policies that comprise our secondary education system

Over the next 15 years, the college-age population is projected to grow substantially, and it will continue to look considerably more diverse than the general population. By one estimate, 80 percent of the growth in college-age population will be non-white and almost 50 percent will be Hispanic (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2001). Among minority students, over 45 percent lack the financial resources to contribute to college costs. In short, poor and minority young people—who have historically been underrepresented in postsecondary institutions and whose completion rates are devastatingly low—will come to dominate the college-age population.

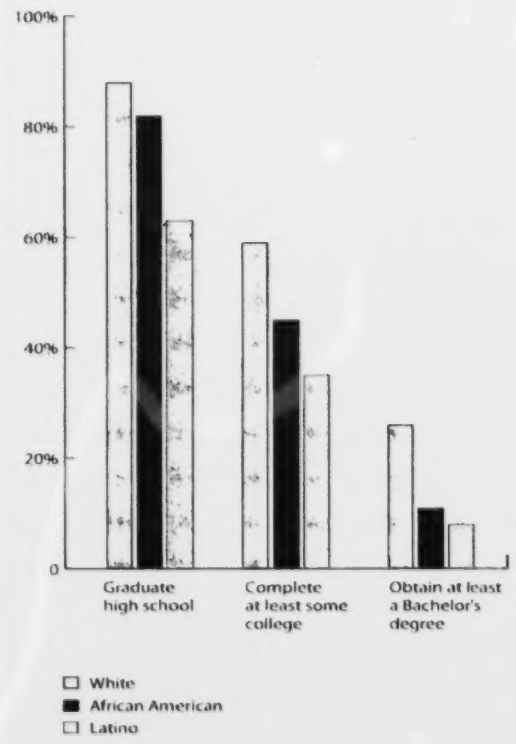
Overall, as a nation, we fare poorly in moving our young people into and through college. While 74 percent of young people get a high school diploma, and nearly three-quarters of these graduates eventually enroll in a postsecondary institution, over half fail to complete a degree, and one-third never even see their sophomore year (Haycock and Huang 2001). Of those entering public two-year colleges, fewer than a third complete a certificate or degree within three years of enrollment (Carnevale and Desrochers 2001).

The numbers are far worse in our urban areas and have reached crisis proportions due in part to the "weak promotion power" of close to half the schools in the nation's 35 largest cities. Nearly 50 percent of the students in these schools do not graduate in four years (Balfanz and Letgers 2001). In a number of large cities (e.g., Cleveland, Baltimore, Indianapolis), the numbers are considerably worse: 60-70 percent of students fail to graduate on time, and only half of these students ultimately get a GED or other form of diploma.

Among those low-income and minority youth who graduate, the completion rates

Race and Ethnicity

Educational Attainment for 100 Kindergarteners



Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports, Educational Attainment in the United States, March 1998

are low. A young person whose family income is under $25,000 has less than a 6 percent chance of earning a four-year college degree (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2001). Among African-American and Hispanic youth, only 18 percent and 10 percent respectively complete a four-year degree by age 29, compared to over one-third of whites (U.S. Department of Education 2001). Native American students are more likely to drop out and less likely to complete college than any other ethnic group in the United States. Such low postsecondary attainment rates for such a significant and growing proportion of our population constitute both a societal and human crisis.

One reason for the huge disparity between low-income youth and their middle- and upper-income peers in college participation and completion rates is the disparity in academic preparation. Only 53 percent of 1992 high school graduates from families with low incomes (less than $25,000) were at least minimally qualified for admission to a four-year college, compared to 68 percent of those from middle-income and 86 percent from high-income families.[1] Other research indicates that the likelihood of a young adult's earning a four-year degree is strongly related to her or his basic skills proficiencies. Students with the lowest skill levels are highly unlikely to complete college, regardless of family income (Harrington and Sum 1999).[2]

But poor academic preparation is not the only contributor to the under-participation and low completion rates of low-income students. Academically qualified low-income students attend and complete college at much lower rates than similarly qualified middle- and upper-income students. One recent study found that low-income students with strong basic skills are only about half as likely to complete college as high-income students with similarly strong basic skills (Harrington and Sum, 1999).

In addition to the astounding number of young people who enter a postsecondary institution but do not complete a degree and those who are academically prepared but don't go to college are the millions more who do not complete high school or complete high school but lack the necessary skills to succeed in skilled employment. In 2000, 3.8 million 16- to 24-year-olds lacked a high school diploma and were not attending high school or college (Toft 2002). One in three Hispanics and one in five blacks fall into this category.[3] The prospects for this population of low-skilled, disconnected youth are poor. In the fall of 2001, just over half of young adults without a high school credential were employed, and only 45 percent of all young dropouts held a full-time job (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2001).

Millions of young people are falling through the cracks: between mainstream high schools and seriously under-financed, second-chance programs and alternative schools; between secondary and postsecondary expectations of what students should know and be able to do; and between schools and the community-based supports and opportunities that might help young people succeed in those schools. If this situation is not addressed, millions of young people will have little chance of developing the literacy and other skills that are essential to advancement in postsecondary learning and careers.

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II. New Ferment, New Opportunities

Young people can emerge from the coming-of-age years as full participants in society and the economy, but only if they have access to learning environments that create pathways to and through college.

An opportunity exists today to move beyond the outmoded, factory-model high school and greatly increase the quantity and quality of more customized, more effective learning environments. Several factors make this a particularly opportune moment to address both the practice and policy challenges involved in doing so. Certainly, the momentum for education reform—and particularly for high school reform—has been fueled by the unacceptably large number of young people whose scores on new state and city assessments fall short of meeting the standards for high school graduation. Particularly in states with high-stakes exit exams, the demand for new approaches is growing, as is interest in charter and alternative schools.

Furthermore, despite growing fiscal crises, support for public education remains strong. In communities across the country, citizens express a continued willingness to use public dollars to improve our schools and even to support expanded choice among educational options. The 2002 midterm elections saw voter approval of costly education initiatives in a number of states, including Florida, California, and Texas, even though each of these states faces a severe deficit (Alliance for Excellent Education 2002).

Interest in alternatives to traditional high school is growing among powerful constituencies. In the face of high failure rates, mayors, community leaders, and governors are calling for new approaches to helping young people get the educational experiences and credentials they need.

Increasingly, practitioners and policymakers alike are recognizing that "to leave no child behind" will require moving beyond the limitations of traditional institutions and institutional arrangements, and it will require more than schools alone. Such calls resonate with growing public and civic recognition of the vital contributions to learning that community resources and institutions can make both during the school day and during the many hours when young people are not in school.

An opportunity exists today to move beyond the outmoded, factory-model high school and greatly increase the quantity and quality of more customized, more effective learning environments.

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III. A Portfolio of Learning Environments for Urban Youth

For several years, Jobs for the Future's *From the Margins to the Mainstream* initiative has studied learning environments that are demonstrating strong results for urban youth.[4] Through this work, we have found that innovations tend to cluster in four institutional types or forms.

- *Reinvented High Schools:* Small, highly focused and rigorous learning environments that use curriculum, staff, community resources, and time in radically different ways to address the developmental as well as the intellectual growth of young people and engage them in work that matters to them and a larger community.
- *Secondary/Postsecondary Blends:* New institutional arrangements aimed at making the transition to college happen *better* (fewer youth fall through the cracks) and *faster* so that most young people have completed a first postsecondary credential by their mid 20s.
- *Extended Learning Opportunities:* Programs that make creative use of time and resources outside of the usual school building and school day to engage young people in intensive learning that is potentially credit-bearing toward high school graduation.
- *Education/Employment Blends:* Programs and institutional arrangements that combine academic and vocational studies, technical training leading to a credential with value in the labor market, and work experience, hence stepping across the usual divide between education and workforce development.

In each of these four types, we have found learning environments that ground themselves in research on effective practice and produce positive outcomes—from better attendance and holding power to higher levels of educational attainment than can be found in institutions serving comparable populations of youth. These "existence proofs" break new ground in bridging the gap between schools and communities, in-school and out-of-school time, secondary and postsecondary studies, and school, work, and citizenship.

Although these programs and schools represent a variety of institutional arrangements, all achieve results by integrating the principles and best practices emerging from the youth development field with those emerging from the investigations of cognitive psychologists into the nature of learning, intelligence, and understanding. Specifically, these learning environments combine pressure and support—putting young people in the company of adults and peers who care about and respect them, who help them learn key skills and do high quality work, and who insist that the work meet real world standards of accomplishment. Such environments are characterized by a human scale that allows the adults to keep a respectful "watchful eye" on the young people in their charge—drawing on their strengths and assets to keep them on track and accountable, while staying attuned to their circumstances in order to provide the "just-in-time" support critical to positive life choices and outcomes. Not surprisingly, many of these same characteristics emerge in numerous studies of small schools as key to achieving good results.

In examining such environments, it is important to look not just at programmatic "best practices" but at their strategies for creating the institutional frameworks to achieve results. In short, these institutions change the deterministic equations that can mire schools in the same old ways of doing things, despite the many reform efforts that come and go. They have acquired the flexibility to customize the learning environ-

Successful institutions have acquired the flexibility to customize the learning environment to match the interests and passions, career goals, and life circumstances of each young person

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ment to match the interests and passions, career goals, and life circumstances of each young person. Their institutional agility allows them to access and orchestrate the range of supports and opportunities needed to help the young person advance to a post-secondary credential.

Each of the four types of programming outlined here holds the promise of helping vulnerable youth gain the educational credentials essential to success in the new economy. The sections below illustrate why it is so important for urban policymakers to make each of these types part of a growing portfolio of effective learning environments.

Reinvented High Schools

Although adhering to a number of shared core design principles, reinvented high schools vary in the degree to which they focus their program around student interests or target services to particular populations of students. Horizonte Instruction and Training Center and Fenway High School are illustrative of this range.

A unique, multi-site public school that includes both high school and adult education services, **Horizonte Instruction and Training Center** in Salt Lake City, Utah, is a highly successful drop-out recovery program serving over 1,000 young people. With one main facility for both youth and adults and nine community-based satellite sites for youth, Horizonte matches each student with a site offering the schedule, location, and resources best-suited to his or her academic needs and life circumstances.

All Horizonte sites feature integrated, hands-on curricula, small classes, flexible scheduling, and open-entry/open-exit. Daily advisories help students progress towards graduation standards, prepare for college and careers, and address obstacles to advancement. Low-income and ethnic-minority students attending Horizonte scored higher on standardized tests than comparable peers at other high schools in the district. www.slc.k12.ut.us/sites/horizonte

Fenway High School in Boston, Massachusetts, is a small public school of choice for students seeking a focused, personalized learning experience. Fenway's status as a "pilot school" gives it substantial autonomy over budget, schedule, hiring, and curriculum. The school uses its resources to support and push students to use habits of mind that enable them to think deeply and critically about any subject and to develop specific academic skills and content knowledge.

Students choose a theme-based learning "family" that serves as an intellectual and physical home for four years and provides extended learning opportunities in the community. Collaborations with community organizations support engagement in real-world projects, professional relationships, and civic action. Advisories meet several times a week to discuss everything from peer interaction to college applications. Supported by social workers, advisors work closely with individual students and their families to promote each student's well-being and academic progress. Fenway sends 90 percent of its diverse student body to college, and pass rates on state exams were higher in 2001 than for any other non-selective urban high school in the state. http://fenway.boston.k12.ma.us

Reinvented High Schools

As the major publicly funded institution serving adolescents, the high school bears a great deal of the responsibility for moving young people toward a productive adulthood. In the last decade, the standards movement has revealed how very far many of our large urban high schools are from fulfilling that responsibility. During that same decade, the development of small and alternative models of schooling has begun to point the way to different, more productive kinds of education for urban youth.

Today, in New York, Boston, Chicago, and other major urban centers, a smorgasbord of school options has become an accepted part of the educational landscape; indeed, some districts are actively promoting the rapid development of more such learning options (e.g., the Bronx in New York City through the New Century Schools Initiative, the Sacramento Public Schools through the Schools for a New Society initiative, the Chicago Public Schools in the small schools initiative). Investments by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are helping cities to incorporate youth development principles, smaller learning communities, new small schools, and varied models of high school into comprehensive, citywide high school reform initiatives.

The goal of such systemic efforts is to make the benefits associated with small schools available to many more students. For models, reformers look to the small but growing number of high schools around the country that are creating highly focused, rigorous learning environments. These schools take advantage of their human scale—most are no larger than 350 to 400 students—to build a vibrant community of students and teachers, where students are known well. They also demonstrate the value of organizing time and

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resources outside of school to increase the kinds of opportunities and supports available to young people, especially in urban environments where youth lack access to the kinds of experience that middle-class children are more likely to receive as a matter of course. *(See the box on page 6 descriptions of how two schools put these design principles into action.)*

These efforts build on a growing research base that has established links between smaller schools and a range of positive outcomes, from better attendance rates and fewer disciplinary actions to higher grades and greater satisfaction with school. The most established of the small schools also report test scores on standardized assessments that exceed the district average, despite a preference in many of these schools for assessments that are more performance-based. Furthermore, the positive effects associated with small schools are most pronounced in those with large concentrations of poor and minority children (see, for example, Howley, Strange, and Bickel 2000 and Lee 2000).

Secondary/Postsecondary Blends

For young people who are low-income, English language learners, or ethnic minorities, the likelihood of completing a postsecondary credential remains appallingly low. The creation of secondary/postsecondary "blended" or hybrid institutions represents a potentially significant step toward addressing this crisis. These groundbreaking institutions change the structure of the high school years and compress the number of years to an Associate's degree (from six or even seven for those needing remediation to five or four to earn both a high school diploma and the two-year college degree). Although relatively new and still few in number, these institutions remove significant barriers to postsecondary transitions, and they provide both the rigorous learning and close supports needed to launch underserved young people into college. *(See the box on this page for descriptions of how two schools put these design principles into action.)*

Secondary/postsecondary blends begin with the premise that learning can be accelerated for adolescents and that high school and college—two separate and often poorly aligned learning environments—can be combined. These institutions eliminate the transition from high school to college: young people complete high school and

Secondary/Postsecondary Blends

A growing field, "secondary/postsecondary blends" serve a range of students from the most academically avid to drop outs. Both College Bound and the Excel Program are designed to target vulnerable young people.

At Portland Community College in Oregon, high school dropouts can earn both a high school diploma and a community college degree. **PCC's College Bound** program offers a balance of support and independence appropriate for older adolescents who have attained a seventh- to eighth-grade reading level. Clustered in learning communities of 20, students take an intensive first-term curriculum designed to bring their writing, reading, math, study and career planning skills up to college level. Students move into college courses that count toward both a high school diploma and an Associate's degree and/or career certificate.

Throughout the program, students are supported by a resource specialist who provides intensive academic and personal counseling and support. With this support, youth who routinely skipped class in high school maintain an average attendance of over 90 percent, and the majority reach in one term the reading proficiency required to enroll in college classes.

Students who do not meet entry criteria for College Bound have other options. For limited English proficient students, the Multicultural Academic Program concentrates on developing language skills, prior to transition to College Bound. Older students with very low skill levels enter a GED program, where they can both earn a diploma and begin the transition into college level courses. www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/edoption/community/pcc.php

The **Excel Program** in Long Island City, New York, was launched by Middle College High School and International High School in collaboration with LaGuardia Community College, where these two small high schools are based. It is the first stage of what will become full-fledged "Early College High Schools" where students earn high school diplomas and Associate's degrees in five years or less. These LaGuardia-based Early College High Schools, which will be the model for several dozen other such institutions around the country, are offering an accelerated option to students who traditionally do not get such opportunities: immigrants, the children of immigrants, and/or students at risk of dropping out. Recently, 90 percent of the eleventh graders in the first cohort met LaGuardia's reading standard for access to credit-bearing courses.

In breaking such new ground, Middle College and International are building on what they have learned in several decades of helping students develop strong literacy skills: for example, the motivational power of engaging intellectual work, the "power of place" within a college to elicit adult behavior from students, and the importance of building writing assignments into every class, of students' presenting portfolios of work both to teachers and outside experts, and of ongoing personal support.

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The students who most need to accelerate their progress—to save tuition costs and get a "leg up" on college—are often least likely to have access to dual enrollment programs.

earn an Associate's degree within a small, supportive learning environment that looks and feels much more like college than like high school—in many cases, the school is on a college campus. These schools embody the notion that intellectual challenge and academic rigor, coupled with the opportunity to save time and tuition dollars, are powerful motivators for young people.

State-level dual enrollment programs are an early prototype for this kind of blended institution. Thirty states allow high school students to earn college credits. For the most part, states use this mechanism to help speed the progress into postsecondary education of higher-achieving youth who might want specialized programs or who might otherwise find the last year or so of high school to be a waste of time. Still, a few states are experimenting with ways to make dual enrollment more accessible and useful to low-income students. Washington state's Running Start and New York City's College Now programs are such examples. College Now students, who take credit-bearing courses at campuses of the City University of New York, accumulate credits more quickly, have better attendance rates, and outscore their peers on the state Regents exam.

Despite such encouraging examples, data emerging from dual enrollment programs suggests that the programs benefit primarily students from the more functional high schools and from middle-class to upper-middle-class families who seek out such opportunities and can make sense of the confusing array of courses at both the high school and college levels. The students who most need to accelerate their progress—to save tuition costs and get a "leg up" on college—are often least likely to have access to such programs.

The Gates Foundation, along with Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ford and Kellogg foundations, has launched a national initiative to create over 100 "Early College" high schools in the next five years. To engage low-income and minority youth and accelerate their progress through the program, several of the organizations receiving grants to create Early College High Schools are combining a focus on academics with extensive supports, personalization, and community-based internships. This effort is extending to state policy as well.

This initiative has identified an array of policies and laws that make some states more opportune places for rooting secondary/postsecondary blends. Critical policy supports include strong K-12 charter laws; uncapped, tuition-free dual enrollment; scholarship incentives for high school achievement; district flexibility in the use of per pupil expenditures; and a commitment to a K-16 system.

As momentum grows for the idea of accelerating learning for adolescents and of combining the two long-separated environments of high school and college, the need and opportunity are growing to support institutions and intermediaries that are tackling the challenge of making such models work for low-income and vulnerable populations of youth. While it is important to address the boredom and alienation even high achievers experience in their last years of high school, blended institutional arrangements bridging high school and college would make an even greater difference to those who are much less likely to complete a postsecondary credential. Given the high stakes for these youth, secondary/postsecondary blends represent a promising approach to advancing to postsecondary success.

Extended Learning Opportunities

Low-income young people need what many middle-class young people get as a matter of course from their schools and communities: an enriched set of electives in school as well as a full complement of extra curricular activities, private lessons, travel opportunities, summer learning experiences, and the like. For low-income young people whose school hours are increasingly spent on the core academic subjects that will be meas-

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ured in state assessments, extended learning opportunities can help to close this gap. The after-school hours are taking on increased importance as the time for young people to develop civic, vocational, and social skills, and to explore interests and passions that can lead to a sense of purpose in the pursuit of postsecondary options.

Although small in size and number, a growing number of high-quality programs around the country are effective in using time and resources outside of the usual school building and school day to engage young people in intensive, purposeful learning that connects them with their futures. The best of these programs "hook" young people by appealing to their passions and giving them opportunities for meaningful connection to their communities and for internships that combine work and learning. *(See the box on this page for descriptions of how two programs put these design principles into action.)*

The value of such programming is well established by recent research. A landmark study from the National Research Council (Eccles and Gootman 2002) reports that participation in community programs for youth "is associated with increases in such outcomes as motivation, academic performance, self-esteem, problem-solving abilities, positive health decisions [and] interpersonal skills." Fueled by growing evidence that participation in community-based youth programs promotes positive outcomes and reduces negative ones for all age groups, public/private partnerships (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the New York Beacon Schools, Chicago's Afterschool Matters) are channeling new resources into large-scale, youth development initiatives.

The growing public concern about the academic performance and educational attainment of our youth creates an imperative and an opportunity for community leaders to integrate educational assets in a more strategic, organized way and to push the agenda of creating high-quality learning opportunities for young people in the non-school hours. The skills that young people gain in these programs, and the interests they develop and pursue, play a critical role in getting them on a pathway to a productive and satisfying adulthood.

Education/Employment Blends

The new economy has raised the bar for all youth: without at least some postsecondary education and training, young people will remain locked out of family-supporting

Extended Learning Opportunities

While after-school programming for older adolescents remains sparse, innovative models, such as City Links and Youth VOICES, are breaking new ground by offering credits for after-school learning and connections to postsecondary education.

City Links in Cambridge, Massachusetts, provides linguistic-minority youth with public-sector apprenticeships, support from a work-site mentor, counseling on access to higher educa ion, and extensive training in and exposure to public service careers and leadership. City Links offers recent immigrants an opportunity to gain the concrete skills and work experience that will help them to achieve self-sufficiency and to have productive lives. At the same time, it works to increase the access of linguistic-minority youth to public-sector careers, continuing education, and leadership roles in their communities.

Participants work in after-school apprenticeships, providing valuable program and interpretation assistance to city employees, while breaking down barriers to diversity. They also attend an in-school course for credit on the public sector, co-taught by a social studies teacher and staff of a community-based organization. The course covers such topics as leadership, community development, the structure of government, translation skills, and public-sector career opportunities.

Youth VOICES in Philadelphia adds a key element—a connection to postsecondary education—to the mix of academic skill-building, leadership development, and career exploration that characterize the most cutting-edge programs. Young people, aged 14-21, sign on to do structured community-based research projects under the tutelage of Temple University students who travel to community organizations as well as schools to offer the program. Through these projects, students learn critical thinking, computer, and research skills, while at the same time honing their leadership and communication skills.

A unique collaboration among the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia at Temple University, Youth Employment Services (YES), and several youth-serving organizations, VOICES taps into the wealth of university resources while connecting youth to meaningful and constructive opportunities within their communities. The community research and other learning activities at the center of VOICES are grounded in a skills-based curriculum taught by trained university students in after-school and summer classes. The curriculum is designed to help young people assess the situations they encounter in their communities and their lives by looking at issues of power, examining stakeholders in the community, and exploring their own potential to play a role in community change. The program operates at several sites in Philadelphia and has plans for a regional expansion. www.temple.edu/uccp/youth.htm

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jobs. This creates challenges for high school vocational education and school-to-career programs, as well as for the employment and training programs that have long represented the only "safety net" for older, out-of-school youth.

At a time when it no longer makes sense to divide young people into those who "do Shakespeare" and those who "do shop," institutional forms and arrangements are emerging that bridge the gaps separating high school, vocational and technical training, and postsecondary education. Whether targeting in-school or out-of-school youth, such a learning environment attends to the educational needs of young people while staying relevant to their immediate vocational needs and interests. The goal is to ensure young people get marketable skills and credentials that catapult them beyond the ghetto of "youth jobs" and, at the same time, help them develop a solid enough foundation of academic skills to pursue more advanced credentials and degrees as working adults.

One promising approach is to replace traditional high school vocational classes with a blending of high school and college coursework, aiming toward the completion of a degree or certificate in a technical career field, such as computer systems and networking or manufacturing technology. This type of programming helps young people gain entrance to well-paid technical careers that require skills and postsecondary credentials but not necessarily a four-year college degree. *(See, for example, the description of Washtenaw Technical Middle College in the box on this page.)*

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1994 provides some support for this direction through its state grants to public schools and postsecondary institutions for "Tech Prep"—defined as the integration of academic and vocational education programs into a continuous sequence aimed at a two-year degree. Although many Tech Prep programs focus primarily on articulation agreements between high schools and technical colleges, the act has spawned some blended institutions offering a high school diploma and credits towards the completion of a degree in a technical career field.

The creation of pathways to postsecondary credentials with value in today's

Education/Employment Blends

For a substantial number of young people, the path to a family-sustaining income is through access to technical careers. Programs that create such access attend to students' educational needs and their potential for postsecondary credential attainment, while staying relevant to their immediate vocational needs and interests. Washtenaw Technical Middle College and ISUS Trade and Technology Prep achieve these goals through "education/employment blends."

Housed at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Michigan, **Washtenaw Technical Middle College** serves students interested in entering a technical field, offering a combination of high school and college classes. With the support of an advisor, counselors, and peers, students move through competency-based, "core transition" academic courses as well as career seminars and study skills courses. They then proceed to courses and career pathways offered by the college, enjoying continuing support as they experience college life and navigate the financial and academic systems. The school has developed literacy and "soft skills" curricula that help all students to succeed but especially those who arrive at this small charter school with learning disabilities, low literacy, or poor higher order thinking skills.

Students graduate with an Associate's degree or a certificate in one of 37 programs within six major career pathways. This enables them to find employment at graduation or to expand their opportunities at a four-year university. With an 80 percent pass rate in their college course work, Washtenaw Middle College students outperform their college student peers on campus. www.washtenaw.cc.mi.us/wtmc

At **ISUS**—short for Improved Solutions for Urban Systems—**Trade and Technology Prep** in Dayton, Ohio, students, almost all of whom dropped out of high school, engage in a program of study that includes high school academic courses, college-level technical courses taught by faculty from Sinclair Community College, and on-the-job learning from journeymen and master craftsmen. In addition to its YouthBuild-associated construction trades program, the school offers two other training programs—computer technology and manufacturing technology—all in partnership with Sinclair. Students earn a stipend while obtaining their high school diploma and college credit, and they make progress towards either construction trades certification (National Center for Construction Education and Research) or the computer-related A Plus and Net Plus certifications.

Academic subjects are taught in the context of the trade the student is pursuing, and learning is active and hands-on. With classes of 13 to 14 students, teachers and counselors can get to know each youth individually, and students can move at their own pace to achieve academic, technical, and personal/civic goals. Although coming in with multiple risk factors, 60 percent of the participants are graduating with a high school diploma and credits toward a nationally recognized credential.

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labor market is particularly critical for older, out-of-school and out-of-work youth who are arguably the most neglected group of young people. Potentially, four to five million young people could benefit from a "second chance" to develop the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that will get them back on track to economic opportunity and self-sufficiency. Programs targeting this population are chronically in short supply. Furthermore, the problem today is not just one of quantity but of quality. Staying relevant to the rising skill and credential requirements of the job market requires youth employment programs to focus more clearly on the educational needs and attainment of the young people they serve.

Experts across the fields of youth employment, juvenile justice, education, and youth development agree about what works with older, disconnected, and vulnerable youth. Key program features include the opportunity to learn while working and earning money, caring adults who have a strong stake and interest in their labor market success, wraparound support services (either directly or through collaborating organizations), and long-term follow-up support (Brown et al. 2002). Evaluations of established national "brand name" programs for older vulnerable youth, such as Jobs Corps and YouthBuild, indicate that comprehensive programs that provide this array of services over a multi-year period result in significant educational, employment, and earning gains for participants (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002).

A scattering of programs have begun to tackle the additional challenge of creating pathways for these youth to postsecondary credentials. Some are operated by established national organizations, such as Youthbuild USA. *(See the description of ISUS in the box on page 10.)* Others have been started by small entrepreneurial ventures, such as Year Up in Boston, Massachusetts. This scalable model, designed by a successful businessman to help 18- to 23-year-olds enter the information-technology industry, combines project-based classroom instruction in technical skills with paid corporate internships.

Developing the kind of education/employment blends that provide better career pathways for both in-school and out-of-school youth is complicated by the fragmentation of the policies, institutions, and programs that serve them. The increasing public focus on educational outcomes and quality provides an opportunity to gain more political and financial support, both for programs that redefine high school vocational education and for institutional forms and arrangements that make good on the promise of a "second chance" for disconnected youth.

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The goal is to ensure young people get marketable skills and credentials that catapult them beyond the ghetto of "youth jobs" and, at the same time, help them develop a solid enough foundation of academic skills to pursue more advanced credentials and degrees as working adults.

IV. Investing in New Learning Environments and Educational Pathways

The rich array of schools and programs described in this report focuses on improving the lives of young people whose needs have not been met by the large impersonal high schools that have long dominated the educational landscape in our cities. Rapid expansion of effective learning options is a critical component of any strategy that leaders in policy and practice adopt to address the growing mismatch between the educational experiences and credentials required by our economy and the low educational attainment of so many of our youth. Achieving this goal will require that policy keep pace with programmatic innovation. New policies are needed both to remove barriers to new school designs and youth programming models and to provide incentives, including adequate funding, for new institutional forms and arrangements that bridge the gaps among high school, "second-chance" programs, and college.

It is both particularly challenging and particularly important to support innovative designs and approaches in a time of deep budget deficits, such as many states and cities are facing today. Certainly the competition for dollars intensifies in such a period. Calls for innovative programming are likely to run headlong into the efforts of long-established educational institutions to sustain their operations. But the importance also grows of addressing the needs of those most likely to feel the brunt of the cuts in educational and social services and of finding new, more efficient and effective ways of delivering services. If policymakers and practitioners are going to address the needs of the millions of youth who are indeed being "left behind," they will have to use available dollars more effectively while building the political will for investing public resources in advancing older, disconnected adolescents to economic self-sufficiency and productive citizenship.

At this point, the vast preponderance of state funding flows directly to local school districts in the form of per pupil dollars. With the exception of the choice and charter school debate, there has been little serious consideration of directing more of these dollars to follow young people into alternative educational environments that are better equipped to meet their needs. Pushed by proponents of school choice, charter school laws are the only legislative vehicle that allows state per pupil dollars to flow to schools that are not operated by public school districts. But the laws vary widely in the restrictions they place on the develop-

Six Action Steps for Improving Educational Outcomes of Urban Youth

- Direct state and local resources to follow young people into reinvented high schools and new institutional blends, such as Early College High School and education/employment programs resulting in postsecondary credentials.
- Make the development of new small schools a key component of systemic, citywide, high school reform efforts.
- Change school construction policies and related regulations that favor large over small high schools.
- Make the development of alternative learning environments for youth who have left the public school system a central component of a citywide human investment strategy.
- Leverage opportunities to extend learning beyond the school day and year and beyond the school building.
- Strengthen the capacity of effective school and program models to achieve scale.

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ment and operation of charter schools, and few incentives encourage these schools to serve the most vulnerable students. Some states and communities also let school districts independently contract with community-based organizations, community colleges, and other providers to design and operate educational programs outside the traditional school system. However, many districts subtract a substantial administrative fee—upwards of 50 percent of the per pupil dollars—and maintain some control over key operational decisions.

A redirection of some state and local education funding to more varied learning environments holds the promise of considerable future savings. Large, under-performing urban high schools are not cost effective. They may often spend somewhat less per pupil than their small counterparts, but their high drop-out and failure rates mean that they cost much more per *graduate* (Funk and Bailey 1999; Stiefel et al. 1998). And that does not count the ongoing costs associated with those who do not make it through high school. High school dropouts are almost three times more likely to receive public assistance and three and one-half times more likely to be arrested than graduates (Lawrence et al. 2002). High-quality dropout recovery can cost as much as three times the per pupil expenditures of high quality small schools. The rapid acceleration of incarceration of older adolescents also carries a very large per person cost (as much as $45,000 to $50,000 per year).[4]

Early College High Schools are testing a similar notion. If these schools result in fewer young people entering college needing remediation, the $1 billion that colleges now spend on developmental education and remedial courses could be redirected to support the enriched programming of secondary/postsecondary blends. Since school failure and dropping out are associated with higher rates of incarceration, approaches that result in greater school success could also result in eventual savings in the growing pot of money going into the juvenile justice system. The types of learning environments featured in this report hold out the promise to citizens of paying once, rather than two or three times, for the education of vulnerable youth.

Redirecting education dollars toward schools and programs designed to get results for vulnerable youth is essential if such opportunities are to become available to the many young people who do not graduate from high school or who graduate lacking the necessary skills and credentials for success in the new economy. In the recommendations below, we suggest six action steps that local and state policymakers can use to support the new designs and program models that are already establishing an impressive track record in a number of cities. Collectively, they represent a critical first step in addressing the crisis in postsecondary attainment.

O Direct state and local resources to "follow" young people into reinvented high schools and new "institutional blends," such as Early College High School and education/employment programs resulting in postsecondary credentials.

States can do a great deal to support improved and expanded options for urban youth through charter legislation, through special statutes to allow money to follow vulnerable students to alternative environments run by nonprofit agencies or community-based organizations, and through flexibility in the flow of a number of different funding streams into new blended institutions.

Create and Strengthen Charter Legislation: Although 40 states have laws enabling the formation of charter schools, states vary greatly in the number of charters they allow, the funding they make available, the degree of autonomy they give charters, and the ways in which they hold them accountable. The strongest laws are those that allow mul-

A redirection of some state and local education funding to more varied learning environments holds the promise of considerable future savings.

One of the biggest obstacles to developing new small schools, including charter schools, is the capital cost associated with retrofitting or building new spaces for such programs.

tiple institutions to hold one or more charters (e.g., the district, nonprofits, community colleges), do not cap the number of charter schools allowed, provide professionals with an alternative route to certification, and give charter schools legal and fiscal autonomy. Robust charter laws can support the growth of reinvented schools as well as institutional blends.

Direct Funding of Alternative Education for Vulnerable Youth: In most urban districts, alternative education programs are seriously underfinanced, often receiving only 50 percent of the per pupil dollars allotted for average daily attendance. In a few Midwestern states, organizing has led to the passage of statutes to ensure that a much higher percentage (90 to 95 percent) of per pupil dollars follow students to alternative programs. Under "children at risk" statutes enacted in Wisconsin and Minnesota in the mid-1980s, students in districts with large numbers of vulnerable youth can choose alternative environments run by nonprofit agencies or community-based organizations; the schools get state per pupil funding as long as students meet the at-risk criteria delineated in the law. Besides creating a more stable funding stream for alternative education, these statutes create a flow of resources to youth-serving institutions.

Flexible Funding for Blended Institutions: Some of the most breakthrough innovations for older adolescents are occurring in secondary/postsecondary blends and education/employment blends. For these programs to flourish, they must be able to access a variety of different state and federal funding streams and to use these in service of the program model. Private funding from foundation and other sources is critical in the start-up phase, but sustainability depends upon stable public funding streams and supportive policy.

An array of state policies and legislation can help institutional blends take root and grow. For example, dual enrollment programs in some states allow high school students to take college courses free of charge; a few states (notably Utah and Florida) also offer free completion of postsecondary degrees to students earning Associate's degrees while in high school. Another potential source of funding is a state's Tech Prep program; these programs provide grants to public secondary and postsecondary institutions for integrating academic and vocational education programs into a sequence aimed at an Associate's degree. Such policies are especially likely to contribute to the success of blended institutions in combination with charter laws and district flexibility in the use of per pupil expenditures.

A few states are experimenting with combining funding streams to support institutional blends. Utah, for example, is using a mixture of the state's weighted per pupil formula, local district revenues, and funds from other sources, such as the National Science Foundation or minority access programs, to support its Early College High School model, called the New Century High School. The Wisconsin YouthBuild coalition has secured eight different state funding sources for its programs. Convinced of the success of the YouthBuild approach, then Governor Tommy Thompson helped the coalition gain funding from various state agencies for both program development and replication.

❹ Make the development of new small schools a key component of systemic high school reform efforts.

Numerous studies have established links between small autonomous schools and a range of positive outcomes, from better attendance rates and fewer disciplinary actions, to higher grades and greater satisfaction with school. Despite such evidence, districts tend to focus high school reform on restructuring large comprehensive high schools, ignoring the potential power of small school development. Given the evidence, the goal should be to give autonomous small schools a chance to take

root in as many communities as possible. This will mean setting aside a percentage of district, private foundation, and state reform dollars for these schools and revising policies that discourage or even prevent innovation and make it impossible for promising new blended institutions such as Early College High Schools to ever gain a foothold.

Small schools are successful because they use autonomy and flexibility to focus resources where they are most needed and to establish the conditions and climate that support excellent teaching and purposeful learning. Charter status generally grants new small schools the required freedom, but if new in-district small schools are to take root and thrive, they will need the flexibility to fashion new job descriptions and hire staff with the interest and credentials to fill these positions, to change work rules established in collective bargaining, and to set their own promotion and graduation requirements, which may differ from policies set by the district.

Boston pioneered such an approach to high school reform in the late 1980s with a groundbreaking collective bargaining agreement among the district, teacher's union, and mayor's office that created the architecture for new small schools. These "pilot schools"—in-district charter schools—enjoy lump-sum budgeting based on a per pupil calculation, as well as significant autonomy in staffing (they hire their own teachers, all of whom are union members), governance, curriculum, and the organization of the school day and school year. At the same time, the pilot schools have instituted a rigorous school-quality review process and are accountable for the academic achievement of their students as measured both through portfolio processes and state assessments. The district is now trying to draw on these lessons in its efforts to combine reform of its comprehensive high schools with the development of new small schools.

Some urban districts have initiated efforts to "convert" existing large high schools into smaller learning communities or schools. Constrained by district policies, collective bargaining agreements, community opposition to school closings, and capital needs costs, districts may see this as the most feasible option for gaining the advantages of "smallness." But if students are to benefit, these conversions will need to be supported by new district policies and bargaining agreements that make it possible for the smaller units to become more like the most effective small schools and youth programs. And this means that they need most of the same conditions of autonomy and flexibility that have allowed such programs to build vibrant learning environments that meet the needs of all their students. Like autonomous small schools, new small learning communities will need to exercise some control over their own budgets, the scheduling of their teachers and students, and the curricula they use to establish an identity and coherency for their programs. The New England Small Schools Network has begun heading down this road in fashioning agreements with school districts in Massachusetts and upstate New York. Districts participating in this Gates Foundation-funded project agree to negotiate more autonomy for the new learning communities being formed within their large high schools.

● Address school construction and other regulations that favor large over small high schools.

One of the biggest obstacles to developing new small schools, including charter schools, is the capital cost associated with retrofitting or building new spaces for such programs. Few charter school laws provide enough startup dollars to support capital needs. This is especially problematic in cities where the occupancy rate is high, and little property is available. In these cities, one promising strategy is to use state and federal capital-improvement funds to convert existing schools into spaces that new small schools can occupy. Another strategy is to incorporate into city development deals

Providing credits for out-of-school learning is especially critical with the shrinking of the urban high school curriculum to core academic skills in response to tightened budgets and pressure to raise the percentages of students who pass high-stakes tests.

Providing more high-quality learning options for older and out-of-school youth will require much stronger coordination of resources, information, regulations, and state policy across the usual divides of K-12, workforce development, postsecondary education, health care, and economic development.

provisions calling upon private investors to include low-cost space for such programming in anything they build.

One way to address the facilities barrier would be to create a public school real estate trust as a quasi-public enterprise that would receive all state and local funds earmarked for school construction and maintenance (see for example, Hill et al. 2000). The trust would own and maintain the stock of buildings available to all public schools—including charter and contract schools. It would also sell surplus buildings, build or lease new space in areas of need, and help schools find space or find sublease tenants for space they no longer need. Without such a mechanism, school districts are unlikely to make school space available to schools other than those they operate.

Capital costs are not the only barrier to creating small learning environments. Many states have regulations that hinder the development of small schools. Key among these are regulations that require specific minimum enrollments in order to qualify for facilities funding and those that require excessive acreage for new schools. Some states have seemingly contradictory policy—recognizing the merits of small schools and at the same time requiring high minimum enrollment. For example, for high schools in North Carolina, the minimum is 800 to 1,200 students.

In contrast, a few pioneering states are forging policies that support the growth of small schools. Passed on the recommendations of the state Department of Education, the Vermont legislature increased funding for its small schools program in 1998. Recent legislation filed in Maryland would require the state to pay 10 percent over the maximum state allocation for construction of schools in "priority funding areas" meeting specific size limits. Existing schools meeting the same requirements would also be eligible for an additional ten percent for renovation, modernization, or remodeling (Lawrence et al. 2002).

❹ Make the development of alternative learning environments for youth who have left the public school system a central component of a citywide human investment strategy.

At this point, most of the discussion, policy formation, advocacy, and action steps for addressing out-of-school youth take place in the marginalized worlds of alternative education or youth employment and training. Meanwhile, standards-based education reforms continue to have considerable public support, financing, and visibility. It is critical for those conversations to come together around the public responsibility to create alternative ways to help all young people achieve at high standards.

A critical first step would be to make the extent of the crisis in postsecondary attainment more visible by redefining accountability measures to count every young person, including those who drop out of the system. The current and projected increases in dropouts, along with the growing number of urban students who may not graduate from high school because they fail to pass exit exams, call attention to the potentially negative impact of raising standards without providing multiple pathways to success (see, for example, Winter 2002).

A citywide human investment strategy would bring together education, mayoral, and youth employment leaders to develop and oversee an accountability system that ensures that youth who have left the public school system have enough learning options to get them back on the road to postsecondary credentials and economic self-sufficiency. Currently, the public investment in such youth lags far behind the investment in K-12 education. For example, the federal budget for K-12 education is $35.0 billion, compared to about $2.7 billion in youth employment and training programs.[5] Providing more high-quality learning options for older and out-of-school youth, such as the education/employment blends described in this paper, will require much stronger coordination of resources, infor-

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mation, regulations, and state policy across the usual divides of K-12, workforce development, postsecondary education, health care, and economic development.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 is a step in this direction, even though existing WIA dollars for youth employment and training programs can serve only a very small segment of the eligible population (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002). Dramatically shifting federal policy on the scope and purpose of youth employment and training, WIA's youth provisions ask a field once characterized by discrete programs focused on short-term outcomes to move toward developing a comprehensive system that helps young people make effective transitions to higher education and living-wage careers. To accomplish this goal, WIA requires that Workforce Investment Boards (the local governing bodies for WIA) establish Youth Councils charged with overseeing WIA youth services and coordinating local youth programs and initiatives, including leveraging limited dollars to affect youth services provided under a variety of funding streams.[6]

While many—and perhaps most—Youth Councils have maintained the status quo, funneling WIA dollars into programs previously funded under the Job Training Partnership Act, others have taken significant steps to fulfill WIA's promise of transitioning out-of-school youth to postsecondary education. For example, the Community Youth Corps, created by the So[illegible]ast Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board, provides education, work experience and training, and supportive services to low-income 16- to 21-year-olds to help them get back on a pathway to a productive adulthood. Through partnerships with postsecondary institutions and on-site services, Community Youth Corps offers career development paths that lead to state licenses, credentials, and college degrees.

● Leverage opportunities to extend learning beyond the school day and year and beyond the school building.

In recent years, a number of cities have invested in the creation of safe and learning-centered environments for children during the non-school hours. However, such learning options drop off dramatically after age 14 and are almost nonexistent beyond 18. (Tolman et al. 2002) This is true despite growing recognition among researchers and policymakers that out-of-school learning can play a powerful role in helping disengaged youth make a successful transition to a productive adulthood. The best of such programs offer older youth opportunities to acquire marketable skills, build expertise in a field of interest, and develop their leadership skills—all of which are key to developing a sense of purpose and direction.

Although the exception, a few cities have targeted older youth in their after-school citywide learning initiatives. Key to their success, these initiatives bring together fragmented city departments and community organizations and businesses in a concerted effort to reach older adolescents. They also incorporate the features of the best after-school programs for older youth in their designs. For example, Afterschool Matters in Chicago has set the ambitious goal of reaching all teens with an approach that features learning through internship as a route to educational and career success. Using the very successful Gallery 37 (an arts- and career-focused program), Afterschool Matters partners with the city to engage key "anchor institutions"—parks, schools, and libraries—in this initiative. The financing comes from the city coffers, in combination with school and park department in-kind support, federal 21st Century Learning Community dollars, and private foundation and corporate support.

Although sparse, efforts to provide credits for out-of-school learning are occurring in small pockets at both the program and policy levels. This is especially critical with the shrinking of the urban high school cur-

State and local policy and practice leaders must be prepared to stay the course, growing and expanding the policies and funding sources that support small schools, blended institutions, and innovative youth programming.

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riculum to core academic skills in response to tightened budgets and pressure to raise the percentages of students who pass high-stakes tests. As high schools hone in on a narrowing set of academic skills, the after-school hours take on increased importance as the time for young people to develop civic, vocational, and social skills and to explore interests and passions that can lead them to a sense of purpose in their pursuit of postsecondary options. As out-of-school learning opportunities take on more of this historically school role, they merit consideration as credit-earning options for young people.

Two statewide experiments in offering credit for out-of-school learning bear watching. The Minnesota *Credits for Learning* statue requires schools to offer students credit for work completed outside of school that demonstrably achieves state academic standards. New Hampshire has piloted a competency-based transcript that includes both students' grades in traditional subjects and evidence of their achieving—in and out of school—the set of core competencies in use in high-performance work situations. One result of the CBT, which is now in use in 14 districts, has been to make the teachers see the potential of using adults and resources outside of school to enhance student learning—far beyond test prep tutoring for exams.

❹ Strengthen the capacity of effective school and program models to achieve scale.

Growth in public demand for effective learning environments—both in and outside of school—brings the issue of supply into sharper relief. Additional investments from private foundations and public funders—over and above program funding—are needed to increase the organizational capacity of successful models to support expansion. In the business world, there is typically heavy front-end investment in the capacity of a firm to support new branches, affiliates, or franchise sites. It will take an analogous investment in effective learning environments, and in the intermediary organizations that spring from and support these environments, for small schools and youth programs to expand their reach.

Some of the groundwork for making such investments has been laid by replication grants from private foundations, such as Edna McConnell Clark's Institution and Field Building Initiative and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Small Schools/Early College High School initiatives. The public and private funds available for new program creation do not usually stretch far enough to support the different and equally important task of moving from the start-up phase to effective, high-quality, and stable operations. Support needs to go to "intermediary" organizations and "replicating agents" that can help schools and youth programs build their capacity.

One promising development is the creation of non-profit entities with the capacity to start and manage an expanding number of new public charter schools. For example, Aspire Public Schools, a nonprofit that operates multiple charter schools clustered into selected areas of California, tries to function like a vision of an ideal school district that isn't bogged down in bureaucracy. The growth strategy calls for concentrating resources within geographic areas to enable ongoing capacity building and continuous improvement activities across schools, to realize economies of scale for everything from professional development to payroll, and to increase the likelihood of having an impact on traditional public schools. Aspire is positioned to achieve financial self-sufficiency by 2005 through a combined short- and long-range strategic plan. State per-student revenues, philanthropic dollars, and long-term debt financing support site and corporate operations and new school growth. Once start-up costs are covered, school sites become self-sustaining, with state revenues supporting operating costs. Charging schools fees for administrative

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services will allow the home office to become self-sufficient once it is operating about 25 schools.

Leveraging Systemic Change

The strategies recommended here lay the groundwork for continuing innovation in our system of preparing young people for productive and satisfying futures. But the danger is that current efforts will remain on the level of experiments around the edges. The path from experimentation and innovation to systemic change is not necessarily direct or clear. Often experiments hit a political wall as soon as they seriously threaten traditional ways of doing things or established institutions. For this reason, state and local policy and practice leaders must be prepared to stay the course, growing and expanding the policies and funding sources that support small schools, blended institutions, and innovative youth programming, and expanding state and community accountability for such efforts.

Such actions could have a bonus: increasing pressure on districts to provide the conditions necessary for the sustainability and growth of autonomous small high schools. Recent research on the ripple effect of charter schools on district reform has found that most districts with multiple charter schools are starting to respond to the changing education landscape in their systems. Common district responses range from improved marketing and public relations efforts to the development of new programs or theme schools similar to those offered by the charter schools (see, for example, review by Bulkey and Fisler 2002).

The threat of losing students and money can also help to leverage reform in more dramatic ways. For example, the groundbreaking 1994 agreement between the Boston school district and the Boston Teachers Union to develop pilot schools came soon after passage of a Massachusetts law that allows state "average daily attendance" money to follow students to charter schools. A few cities, such as Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Boston, are approaching what some people predict as the "tipping point" that must be attained before pressure from the margins really begins to be felt (e.g., 15 to 20 percent of graduates coming from small and alternative schools). Systems like these bear watching over the next few years.

If high-quality learning environments are to become available to all young people, the types of institutional forms and arrangements highlighted in this report will have to become the basis for a reconfigured educational delivery system, offering a coherent set of pathways toward recognized postsecondary credentials. The continuing public support for improving public education and the growing concern about the crisis in postsecondary attainment are creating a unique moment of opportunity for moving forward with this important and potentially far-reaching agenda.

If high-quality learning environments are to become available to all young people, the types of institutional forms and arrangements highlighted in this report will have to become the basis for a reconfigured educational delivery system.

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Notes

[1] See http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2000

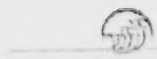
[2] Less than 1 percent of low-income, low-skill students earn a college degree, while just 3 percent of the highest income, lowest skills students earn a degree.

[3] See http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2000

[4] The U.S. spends $10 billion a year on juvenile justice, but most of this money is used for incarcerating young people despite the fact that research has shown that confinement in locked facilities is the most expensive and least effective of adjudication options.

[5] The $2.7 billion represents federal dollars from the Workforce Investment Act, the Department of Labor's Job Corps, and HUD's YouthBuild program.

[6] WIA youth services are available to low-income 14- to 21-year-olds who face at least one of a half-dozen barriers to employment. About one-third of WIA youth funds must go to programs for out-of-school youth.



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